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THE SCIENCE OF SOCIOLOGY: A REPLY

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Nothing more truly amazing has appeared of late in the name of science than the article by Professor Henry Jones Ford on "The Pretensions of Sociology" in your issue of April 29. When a whole class of scientific men, some of whom are as careful investigators and thinkers as American scholarship has produced, are attacked indiscriminately, they certainly have a right to demand that prejudice shall not be their judge.

In the first place, Mr. Ford does not distinguish between sociology and sociologists; nor does he distinguish these latter from social radicals and revolutionaries. All the plausibility of his argument is due to this confusion of the science and its votaries, together with the fact that he selects Spencer and Ward as typical sociologists, although their systems of sociological thought were formulated over a quarter of a century ago. There is scarcely one in the whole list of "established sciences" which has not in some stage of its development been exploited by quacks and visionaries. This is notably true of political science or philosophy, which produced a whole crop of dangerous radicals from Hobbes to Rousseau. At the present time, there is scarcely a mental healer in the United States who does not appeal to the science of psychology as the foundation of his art. Yet who would judge the science of psychology by such quacks?

As a matter of fact, very few sociologists of reputed standing endorse the revolutionary ideas which he credits all with possessing. Free love, trial marriage, divorce by mutual consent, the contract theory of society, and other anarchistic ideas, so far from being endorsed by a majority of sociologists, have, perhaps, been more powerfully combated by them than by any other class of scientific men. A few socialists and revolutionaries have put forward these ideas in the name of sociology, but not sociologists in the sense of scientific students of society. I challenge Professor

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Ford to name a single sociologist of standing who contends "that we should all be as free to find our affinities as cats or dogs;" or that "human beings should be free to mate as they please, and separate as they please, like other animals enjoying their natural freedom."

Even if the essence of Mr. Ford's criticisms holds as against a few individual sociologists of standing (and I admit that it does), still this should in no wise prejudice the question of the legitimacy of sociology as a science. What, then, is sociology? Sciences are distinguished by their problems, yet only a few sciences can be said to have a distinct field of their own. The same phenomena may be, and are, studied from many different points of view, or with reference to different problems, and different sciences result. Thus human society is the subject-matter of many different sciences, but none of these study it from the same point of view, or with the same problems in mind. Sociological literature from Comte down to the present shows that all sociologists worthy of the name have had practically the same problems in mind. These problems were set by Comte himself, viz., problems of the organization or order of society on the one hand, and problems of the progress or evolution of society on the other. The statement of these problems has been changed often by later sociologists by analyzing or breaking them up, and some have even added extraneous problems to the science; but with all sociologists of repute the problems of social evolution, on the one hand, and of social organization on the other, have been central. That is to say, human interrelations and their changes have occupied the attention of sociologists. Probably most sociologists today would say that they are studying the laws or principles of social change, and of social structure and function; or, to put it in still other words, they are investigating the origin, development, structure, and function of the forms of association.

These are not new problems in the history of thought, nor is sociology a new science except in the sense that it proposes to attack these problems by the new methods of positive science. Aristotle, Bodin, Hobbes, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and many others had more or less to say about these problems; but it was Comte's merit that he first definitely proposed to attack them by the methods of natural science, and he saw, too, that they belonged, not to politics, but to a science fundamental to all the special social sciences, which he named sociology. Yet, of course, even if

Comte had never lived, there would still be a body of knowledge, or rather of theory, slowly becoming settled, which would correspond to sociology, though it might not have had this name. If there is any other science that has made these problems its main object of research, then the sociologist is perfectly willing to surrender his field; but, being interested in these problems, he is not willing to do this until he is shown that there exists such a science. Professor Ford implies that political science is able to take care of all the problems with which sociology deals. But I should like to ask him if a theory of society (human interrelations) is not quite different from a theory of the state or government? Most political scientists of the present are careful at the outset to distinguish between society and government, and say that their discipline is concerned only with the latter. In the past there have been political thinkers who have held to a contract theory of the state, but not of society. It would seem to be plain without argument, then, that the state is but one of many forms of association with which sociology may deal, but so important a form that it has developed a special science to deal with its many problems. To propose that this special science, political science, should reincorporate into itself sociology after the two have been differentiated is to propose that the historical process of increasing division of labor among the sciences should be reversed.

How, then, do sociologists propose to approach these problems of social change and social organization from the side of positive science? Simply by the use of the methods and principles of the "established sciences," especially of biology and psychology. In its more theoretical aspects, sociology is simply the biology and psychology of our social life, or, to be more exact, of the origin, development, structure, and function of the forms of association. Approaching its problems from the point of view of natural science and eschewing metaphysical principles, it could be nothing else. That sociology draws its principles of interpretation from other sciences is nothing strange, for this is true of many sciences. Physiology, for example, is nothing but the physics and chemistry of organic functions. At least this is the view held by conservative physiologists. What would be left of political science if one took from it history, psychology, jurisprudence, and, I may add, sociology? If it be claimed that the historical element and method give to political science its distinct character, then the same claim

can be made for sociology, as Comte himself emphasized. If it be claimed that the subject of which political science treats is a unity and requires a unified science, then again the same claim can be made for sociology. The psychological and biological aspects of sociological theory by no means reduce that science to mere psychology and biology, any more than the psychology in economic theory reduces economics to psychology. Social evolution and social organization are unified processes, and a theory of social evolution and organization must take into account and harmonize both their psychological and biological elements.

Professor Ford adds to the speciousness of his argument by carefully selecting sociologists that are easy to criticize. He does not mention Tarde, Simmel, Barth, Ratzenhofer, Hobhouse, or Westermarck, but selects particularly Spencer and Ward as typical sociologists. Both of these men in their thinking were dominated by the traditional English philosophy, with its materialistic empiricism and sensationalistic psychology. Both were at bottom anti-Darwinian in their views of life, and hence in their theories of society. Nearly all that Mr. Ford says in criticism of their sociological doctrines is entirely just so far as it goes, but he forgets to mention their really great services to the scientific study of human society.

Mr. Ford has his own sociological theories (as every thinking man has), and strongly implies that a correct theory of social evolution can be built simply upon Darwin's teachings. He seems to be unaware that the "massive parapets and bastions" of Darwinism have recently been shaken to their foundations, and that a theory of society built upon them (as many sociologists whom he neglects to mention have attempted) may be no more secure than other theories. The truth is, sociology and all the other social sciences must wait upon the development of biology and psychology; and these antecedent sciences are, even today, in an unsettled condition. How absurd, then, to demand that sociology shall have a settled body of theory, or else deny to it the name of science! None of the social sciences possesses a settled body of theory; and no one understands so well as the trained sociologist how perilous it is to dogmatize on social questions. Probably if psychologists and biologists were to express themselves on the questions of the day, they, too, would express themselves dogmatically, and I believe that about the same proportion of radicals

would be found among them. While Mr. Ford is sure that "there is no such science" as sociology, and that "there is no basis for it as a science," still he stands almost alone in his dogmatism upon this matter. If anyone is fitted to judge such a question impersonally, it is the workers in the other general sciences most closely related to sociology, viz., biology and psychology; and within the last dozen years biologists and psychologists have come to recognize very generally that there is a place for sociology. The lack of a clear field with a well-marked boundary for sociology has produced various petty bickerings and jealousies between sociologists and workers in other social sciences. But in the very nature of things, as I have already pointed out, there can be no such clearly defined field for sociology. As a general science it will always be difficult to differentiate it clearly from the special sciences which labor in the same field. In this respect, sociology is not different from other general sciences. Biology cannot be easily differentiated from the special biological sciences; and but a few years ago some workers in these special sciences refused to recognize the existence of a general science of biology. Now, however, it is quite generally recognized that certain problems, such as the theories of heredity, of variation, of selection, and of organic evolution, cannot be adequately dealt with by the special biological sciences. If it is convenient and even necessary to recognize a general science fundamental to all the special biological sciences, it is even more necessary, it could easily be shown, on account of the menace of one-sided views of the social life, to recognize a general science fundamental to all special social sciences.

Sociology, as a scientific endeavor, has had at least two distinct merits; first, it has stood for the natural-science view of human society, which, traditionally at least, the special social sciences have not stood for; secondly, it has as a consequent emphasized the psychological and biological elements in human social life as primary, rather than the economic and political elements. Sociology has, on the one hand, stood for applying the methods of positive science to the problems of the social life; on the other, for obtaining an all-sided, comprehensive view of the social life as opposed to fractional or one-sided views. The scientific importance of this endeavor, it seems to me, cannot be overestimated. If the right development of the humanistic sciences depends upon getting rid of one-sided views of collective human life; if sociology is simply

the name for the larger, completer view of the social life; if, finally, the social sciences can furnish man with the means of mastering his social environment, as the physical sciences have furnished him with the means of mastering his physical environment, then it would seem not unreasonable to say that he who opposes sociology as such is unconsciously an enemy of mankind.